



July 26, 2007

Mary Selecky, Secretary
Department of Health
PO Box 47890
Olympia, WA 98504-7890

Dear Secretary Selecky:

Once in awhile two topics of long-standing interest merge. In this instance, one interest is the continuing challenge a significant number of hospitals face placing patients needing long-term care after discharge from the hospital. The second is Certificate of Need (CON), which the department and WSHA have discussed and worked together on the last several months. The immediate issue is the proposal, for CON purposes, to increase the minimum age from 65 to 70 for the formula used to predict long-term care bed need.

From calculations provided by the Careage company of Gig Harbor, it appears the higher age produces a swing in the long-term bed need of nearly 9,000 beds. The state supply would go from an estimated shortage of beds of more than 4,000 to a surplus of greater than 4,000. On the face of it, if the calculations are correct, that change is a concern just because of its magnitude.

Three years ago I did a survey of members regarding long-term care placement concerns. There were significant, routine problems placing patients or placing them within 30 miles of home or the hospital in Spokane, Grays Harbor, Benton, Franklin, and Klickitat Counties. Each month sampled in 2003 and early 2004, there were 400 to more than 700 patient days awaiting placement in just 32 hospitals. In addition to continuity concerns with long-distance placements, these are patient days for which the hospital would receive little or no payment. Although the problem eased in Klickitat County, I am told the problem is worse today in Spokane County. Also, one discharge planning office reminded me that there is a seasonality to this issue. There needs to be a surplus of beds in order to handle higher demand in the winter.

WSHA requests that the department have a couple more meetings to discuss this proposal and its subtleties more thoroughly. WSHA will gladly participate.

Sincerely,

Robb Menaul
Sr. Vice President

300 Elliott Avenue West
Suite 300
Seattle, WA 98119-4118
Phone 206-281-7211
Fax 206-283-6122
www.wsha.org